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"SECRECY VEILS HIGH ALTITUDE RESEARCH JET"

U-2 Lockheed Called 'Super Snooper'

By Wayne Thomis

The mysterious Lockheed U-2 "high altitude research" airplane found on Sunday in Nevada after a four day, seven state search was one of a series of airplanes of that type that have been flown during the last six months in Europe and out of Japan under top security classification of the department of defense, the TRIBUNE has learned.

At least three of these airplanes were based in England at Lakenheath, and later at Weisbaden, Germany, during the later months of 1956. One was crashed, reportedly with fatal results to the pilot as in the case of the U-2 found near Indian Springs, Nev. The others were repeatedly seen flying in Germany and Britain and were dubbed "supper snooper" aircraft by air force GI's in their maintenance crews.

Only One Photo Released

The only published photograph of the U-2 was released by Lockheed under authority of the air force and the national advisory committee for aeronautics in February. It was published in the Lockheed Aircraft corporation's annual report and mention was made that the company had developed the U-2 for certain specialized categories of extremely high altitude flying--one of these being upper air weather observations.

"The U-2 had a great many other potentialities," an NACA authority told a German aviation magazine writer in December, 1956. "Imagine uses of a jet airplane capable of sustained, long-time flights at heights up to 65,000 feet and perhaps higher."

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Report All Pilots Civilians

One story widely reported in Germany and echoed in Japan is that U-2 pilots (it is a one-seater aircraft) have all been civilians so they "might be disclaimed if they should alight in a foreign territory unfriendly to the United States."

The U-2 is an odd looking plane, deceptively simple in its external lines. It has an extremely wide full cantilever (internally braced) wing. Where the fighters are now tailored with swept or close clipped wings (the Lockheed F-104 has a 21 foot span), the U-2's wings spread nearly 70 feet. Their aspect ratio (average width to span) reportedly exceeded 1-16.

Vast Fuel Capacity

This is a typical engineering solution to the requirement for continued high altitude flying. Such wings also offer internal stowage for vast fuel amounts. The fuselage or hull of the U-2 is a circular tube 65 feet long with a single front seat. The jet engine, situated far aft, is a Pratt & Whitney J-57 with water injection for 11,300 pounds of take-off thrust.

A number of persons who saw this airplane flying in England reported that its landing gear consisted of two double main wheels, one pair forward and the other aft along the fuselage. Light "balancing" wheels were attached to the broad wings approximately two-thirds of the way toward the tips.

Drops Landing Gear

The entire gear main wheels and balancing units, reportedly is dropped when an operational take-off is made. The plane alights after a high altitude mission on skids.

Only the vaguest estimates of performance have been made. It is said that the U-2 can fly nearly two miles higher than any known jet fighters in operation today. It also is reported that an extensive camera installation is included in

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nose section. This array reportedly was the inspiration for its crew designation as a "super-snooper" or "St. Peter's special."